Women in Ministry Affirmed at Retreat

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Blue Mountain Seventh-day Adventist Elementary School (BME) staff in Hamburg, Pa., weren’t sure if BME would open as scheduled this year after an EF-1 tornado destroyed the building this summer. But, this week more than two dozen students began the school year as scheduled thanks, in part, to Blue Mountain Academy and the Blue Mountain Academy church, who offered the temporary use of their facilities.—Tamyra Horst

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Student Overcomes Odds to Graduate

Coming from the inner city area of Whitehall Avenue in Kingston, Jamaica, and surrounded by poverty and crime, Fabian Taffe’s life could have been much different. Providentially, at the age of 15, while attending an evangelistic series at the Whitehall church, he chose to follow Christ. At his baptism, the evangelist, someone whom he had just met, prophesied, “You will be a pastor one day!”—Lisa Krueger

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Women in Ministry Affirmed at Retreat

Michelle Bernard

Jenevieve Lettsome is flanked by Pranitha Fielder and Dave Weigley

Fourteen-year-old Jenevieve Lettsome, a member of Potomac Conference’s Beltsville (Md.) church, was driving home with her family from the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio when she heard that the delegates had voted to not allow divisions to decide whether or not they can ordain women within their territories.

Story by V. Michelle Bernard

“I remember it just kind of hit me, not knowing what happened. … I thought about the youth, the girls who wanted to be pastors. It really hit me to my heart and it really hurt because at that point, I was wondering if I could [still] become a pastor,” she says.

Pranitha Fielder was also discouraged after the vote. “I cried for the women across the world who cannot do what they are called to,” says Fielder, pastor for discipleship and congregational care at Potomac’s Sligo church in Takoma Park, Md. Although Fielder says she feels supported in ministry, she wanted to offer support to other women pastors and youth.

“I felt like we made growth with a combination of seeing the lord and each other,” says Josephine Benton, the first woman to be ordained as an elder in the Seventh-day Adventist church.

“[After the vote] a couple women in ministry told me that they started doubting their call. … If pastors who had been in ministry for years could doubt their call, I thought, What about these young girls in high school, how much more would girls in high school and college potentially doubt their call?” says Fielder.

Cheryl Wilson-Bridge speaks as Dave Weigley looks on.

To facilitate healing for women pastors and mentorship for young women, Fielder and Sonia Perez, youth pastor at the Beltsville church, planned “At the Master’s Feet: A Time for Affirmation, Connection and Education.”

Forty-four women, including 15 high school, college and seminary students, attended today’s retreat at Sligo church. Several North American Division and Columbia Union Conference administrators also attended and assured the participants they will continue to support, affirm and recognize women in ministry.

William Miller, president of the Potomac Conference, started the
day with a much-needed devotional of assurance: “The yes of God is louder than the no of the church,” said Miller.

Nia Philip, a member at Allegheny East Conference’s Miracle Temple in Baltimore, assists Brenda Billingly in an illustration about teamwork.

Dave Weigley, Columbia Union president, added his affirmation. “I always told the brethren that if a person is called, they have to work in that gift. I have not met a woman pastor who doesn’t give her all. Most of them give 110 percent.”

After attendees brainstormed ways to move forward and support each other in ministry, Brenda Billingly, an associate in North American Division Ministerial, who regularly mentors aspiring pastors, led the group in an anointing ceremony and prayed for continued courage.

Photo by Richard Castillo

While one meeting won’t change the entire situation, it buoyed attendees, including Lettsome, who said she felt enlightened about the situation of women in ministry. “It inspired me to work harder about what God wants me to do.” She’s still planning on becoming a pastor.
Adventist Students Put Sabbath Ahead of Prestige

Michelle Bernard

When Takoma Academy students Courtney Saunders (’17), Lyshll Prudente (’16) and Rachel Manuel (’16) were notified that they had been selected to attend the 2015 Achievement of the Mind Program, it seemed like the opportunity of a lifetime. The prestigious summit features mentoring opportunities with Nobel laureates, Pulitzer Prize winners, famous athletes and other individuals of influence.

Story by Ron Mills

However, the students’ anticipation changed when they learned their request to observe God’s Sabbath would not be granted.

“I had to choose whether or not I was going to attend this program or choose to honor the Sabbath day,” says Saunders. “If I decided to go, I would have blatantly gone against my principles. I’m glad I took a stand for my God and would do it all over again if I had to.”

Prudente adds, “It would have been such a great program to participate in, but keeping the Sabbath is more important to me. Maybe this will just lead to another, better opportunity to witness to others.”

Carla Thrower, principal, is proud of the students’ demonstration of faith. “Some say that the Millennials have no direction, no backbone and inability to focus, but these actions can restore confidence in the generation as we mediate on the stand taken by our students … May we all take courage and honor God in our time of testing as have Courtney, Lyshll and Rachel.”

Feature Photo: Rachel Manuel, Lyshll Prudente and Courtney Saunders
Tornado-Ravaged BME Reopens

Michelle Bernard

Blue Mountain Seventh-day Adventist Elementary School (BME) staff in Hamburg weren’t sure if BME would open as scheduled this year after an EF-1 tornado destroyed the building this summer. The twister removed most of the classrooms’ roof, completely removed the gym roof and knocked down several walls.

Story by Tamyra Horst, Pennsylvania Conference

The tornado destroyed the building, but it did not destroy the future of Seventh-day Adventist elementary education in Hamburg. BME has served families in Hamburg and the surrounding areas since 1954, and its staff is committed to continuing to provide an Adventist, Christian education that includes academic excellence, social development and spiritual growth. The school board and task force created to work with the school and community in the aftermath of the storm quickly worked to establish a new location. “One of our first priorities after the tornado was to do what was best for the students and staff,” states Jeff Bovee, conference vice president of education. “It was important to be able to open on time and provide them with all the resources they needed.”

August 18 more than two dozen students began the school year as scheduled thanks, in part, to Blue Mountain Academy (BMA) and the Blue Mountain Academy church, who offered the temporary use of their facilities. Within a week of the storm, salvaged materials were put into place in the church’s Sabbath School rooms. Volunteers and BMA students went through hundreds of books one-by-one, salvaging about 40 percent. Volunteers donated other needed items and staff purchased supplies, set up and decorated rooms and hosted an open house before the first day, giving students and their families an opportunity to see the new classrooms.

“It was amazing to see the outpouring of support from the community at large,” says Merle Whitney, chairman of the BME school board and task force. “Nearby residents and TV camera crew members joined volunteers from the school and church families. Wal-Mart, Dunkin’ Donuts, Lowe’s and Pizza Hut donated water, tarps and food.”

Feature photo: Rachel Wardecke, principal, has 12 students in her classroom this year.
Washington Adventist University Theology Student Overcomes Odds to Graduate

Michelle Bernard

My life is a testimony to God’s blessings,” says Fabian Taffe, a 2015 Washington Adventist University theology graduate. “Studying at WAU for two years has been a great experience and blessing in my journey to becoming a pastor. The connections I’ve made with faculty, staff and other students have been priceless. The teachers are always available to give you the time you need. I have also found many opportunities here to serve others—both locally and internationally.”

Story by Lisa Krueger, Washington Adventist University

Coming from the inner city area of Whitehall Avenue in Kingston, Jamaica, and surrounded by poverty and crime, Taffe’s life could have been much different. Providentially, at the age of 15, while attending an evangelistic series at the Whitehall church, he chose to follow Christ. At his baptism, the evangelist, someone whom he had just met, prophesied, “You will be a pastor one day!”

With the support of the Whitehall church family and his mother, Taffe worked as a Bible worker during the day and shared his faith at evening evangelistic meetings. Fighting and shootings were common among gangs in the area, and rivalries and shootings caused people to fear leaving their homes and attend the meetings. Even he was fearful for his safety and questioned God, “Should I keep doing Your work?”

As the youngest of four sons, Taffe lived with his mother after his parents separated. Although he finished high school, he didn’t complete the requirements for the Caribbean Secondary Examination Counsel to qualify for university admission, so he took a job pumping gas. But, he continued to feel God’s calling on his life to become a pastor. He realized he needed to complete his education. But how? He was 22, uneducated, jobless and living with his mother. He implored God, “If You want me to serve, show me how.”

A pastor friend urged Taffe to step out in faith and claim Psalm 24, which says, “God will give you everything you need; He will supply the resources.” He stepped out in faith and a couple at his church offered to pay for his first year’s tuition at Northern Caribbean University in Jamaica.

He took a step of faith and applied. After qualifying, he attended the university for three years. It was during this time that he met Khadene (pictured with Fabian), who became his wife in May 2012. She had her master’s in nursing and was teaching at the University of the West Indies nursing program in Jamaica. Shortly after their union, she took a job teaching nursing at WAU, and Taffe joined her after obtaining the necessary papers to move.

“My family and my church have been supportive and are proud of my accomplishments,” he says. His future plans now include getting his master’s and doctorate from Andrews University (Mich.) and working in the United States as a pastor.